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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters: a gender perspective

Statement submitted by Human Rights Advocates International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Prevention of Natural Disasters:
An Examination of Water and Deforestation Challenges

Submitted on behalf of Human Rights Advocates, Inc., a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

1. This statement addresses the second thematic issue for the 46th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women: a gender perspective of environmental management and mitigation of natural disasters. The language of the meeting topic employs a reactionary rather than precautionary policy approach. Preventing conditions that either worsen or create natural disasters that affect women should be an important component of the discussion. This statement proposes a broader framework to consider these issues, specifically a preventative framework and will focus on water and deforestation as examples because of their impact on women's lives. Although natural disasters are nature driven many more are manmade or worsened by a lack of environmental protectionism.

2. Generally, the international free trade discussions focus on economic development. Often to attract foreign investment countries lessen or ignore their environmental laws and standards.[1] An extreme example of this is Russia's President Putin's dissolution of the Committee on Environmental Protection and Forest Service.[2] The extinction of this regulatory agency freed businesses from environmental concerns.

3. Regional trade agreements and organizations encourage economic development without fully addressing environmental concerns. The European Union (EU) demonstrates the other end of the spectrum where free trade flourishes while addressing environmental needs. The EU's work to make environmental crimes such as pollution punishable under criminal law demonstrates their commitment.[3] Trade pacts must incorporate environmental consciousness otherwise they can worsen natural disasters.

4. Environmental destruction, through water scarcity and pollution as well as deforestation, presents serious global challenges.

I. **WATER**

5. Water is a resource impacting many areas of women's lives. Water now is more of a threat to women for the resource is becoming contaminated and scarce. On another level water through flooding can suspend normal life, spread disease and leave many homeless. On average between 1972 and 1996 floods

[1] Food First Volume 7, Number 3 Summer 2001 pg 2.
[2] www.glasnet.ru/~ecojuris.
[3] http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/l28062.htm.

affected over 65 million people. Thus, floods have affected more people than any other disaster, including war, drought and famine.[4]

6. The world's drinking water supply has fallen by almost two-thirds since 1950. Every year twelve million people die as a result of water shortages or contamination.[5] By 2050 half the world's population will be living with water sources below what is necessary for agriculture and sanitation.[6] Fifty liters per person per day covers basic human water requirements for drinking, sanitation, bathing and food preparation. In 1990, over a billion people had access far below the minimum water requirement.[7] In Kenya, for example a large family daily purchases between two and eight liters of water per person. Throughout developing countries the poor can pay ten times more for water than the wealthy.[8]

7. Water plays an integral role in women's daily lives and lessened amounts of sanitary water poses health risks. Women are the primary water carriers, managers and end-users. Consequently they are the ones in most direct contact with water and therefore most vulnerable to water-related diseases. Moreover unsanitary water usage has been recognized to affect reproduction and spread diseases such as cholera.[9] Often pollution is worsened through flooding by further polluting clean water.

8. Generally "water has moved from being an endless commodity that may be taken for granted to a rationed necessity that may be taken by force."[10] Many of the people who will face lack of water reside in developing countries requiring more water to support their development.[11] Inadequate water and sanitation facilities constitute some of the most critical problems faced by the developing world. Approximately eighty percent of all sickness and diseases can be attributed to inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities.[12] For this reason it becomes exceedingly necessary to recognize the challenges and take steps to meet them.

9. The lack of water and poor sanitation threaten the human rights to life and health recognized in numerous international agreements including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Convention on

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[4] http://www.dams.org/report/report_factsheet.htm.
[5] HTTP://WWW.DSE.DE/AKTUELL/COP4NEWS.HTM.
[6] Lowry, Joan. Water Supply Won't Meet World's Needs, San Francisco Chronicle, Sunday November 11, 2001.
[7] http://www.dams.org/report/report_factsheet.htm.
[8] www.ifrc.org/docs/news/99/99032201.
[9] In These Times, April 30, 2001 and ww.wifrc.org/docs/nnews/99/99032201.
[10] Global Water Corp (Food First Vol 7, Number 3, Summer 2001 pg. 3.
[11] Id.
[12] Sally Sontheimer, Women and the Environment. Monthly Review Press 1991.

Civil and Political Rights.[13] Water is one essential component of providing women these universal rights. To ensure people have this right the covenant employs states to take steps to fully realize these rights by improving all aspects of environmental hygiene. Hygiene and water have a close relationship when polluted water becomes unsafe to drink, and spreads disease.

II. DEFORESTATION

10. Deforestation creates situations where natural disasters are more likely to occur and in their occurrence affect women. Destroying the forests "entails not only the extinction of an unimaginable number of living species of flora and fauna, but also the annihilation of the hopes and rights of future generations."[14]

11. Forests directly impact the lives of women worldwide. The destruction of the forests causes multiple problems within households and leads to larger natural disasters associated with erosion and desertification. Trees provide livelihood, nutrition and shelter for many in rural economies.

> In non-industrial regions, trees are inextricably woven into the rural and household economies. They are used to provide fuel, fodder and food. They supply medicines and shade, increased soil fertility, shelter from the wind and protection from the rain. From them women fashion many of the products used in the house- and, often enough, the house itself. Perhaps most importantly of all, trees and forests provide many rural women with their only source of personal income.[15]

Every part of a tree has a purpose. Leaves, seeds, pods, sap and bark all have nutritional purposes.[16] Current events have lessened the availability of trees and deprived women of the relatively easy access they once had to tree products. Some say this problem reflects an orientation of current development programs towards cash rather than household economies.

12. Every year since 1990 six million hectares of productive land have been lost to land degradation.[17] Deforestation increases landslide chances that can seriously affect women's lives. El Salvador is a tragic example where development, population growth and war attributed to deforestation after which erosion

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[13] 11/08/2000 E/C.12/2000/4.
[14] Luigi Campiglio et all. The Environment after Rio: International Law and Economics, Grahm & Trotman Ltd, 1994, page 65.
[15] Sally Sontheimer, Women and the Environment. Monthly Review Press 1991, page 67.
[16] Id at 68.
[17] http://www.dse.de/aktuell/cop4news.htm.

and an earthquake caused major economic and environmental harm.[18] Many of the landslides following the earthquake were the result of the tree loss and construction of buildings on those lands.

13. "Rio left the door wide open for countries to continue unsustainable uses of forests."[19] One example is in Mexico, where forestry requirements have been eased for business. Specifically the 1986 Forestry Law did not limit developing forests into commercial plantations. These standards opened the door for a World Bank loan aimed at developing Chihuahua and Durango's forests.[20] The notion of developing forests threatens environmental stability and can as in El Salvador enable natural disasters to cause further devastation to the environment that will end up affecting women.

14. Recognizing the huge trend for ridding the world of forests the international community has laws aimed at helping to alleviate this loss.[21] The Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 adopted at the Rio Conference paved the way for forestry accountability and stabilizing the environment for women.

15. Agenda 21 Chapter 11 reflects a global forestry conscience and commitment to developmental and environmental cooperation.[22]

Agenda 21 recognizes that:

> states have the sovereign and inalienable right to utilize, manage and develop their forests in accordance with their development needs and level of socio-economic development and on the basis of national policies consistent with sustainable development and legislation[23]

In contrast Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration recognizes that "states have… the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies."[24] This clause has been interpreted to allow state sovereignty as a means to escape international environmental regulations

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[18] In These Times, April 30, 2001.
[19] Luigi Campiglio et all. The Environment after Rio: International Law and Economics, Grahm & Trotman Ltd, 1994, page 69.
[20] Id.
[21] http://www.unccd.int/convention/text/leaflet.php.
[22] http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/agenda21chapter1.htm http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/iff-ifpd.htm.
[23] Luigi Campiglio et all. The Environment after Rio: International Law and Economics, Grahm & Trotman Ltd, 1994, page 68.
[24] Luigi Campiglio et all. The Environment after Rio: International Law and Economics, Grahm & Trotman Ltd, 1994, page 44.

that could be attached to lending programs. Sovereignty without responsibility adds to the potential for natural disasters in that states lack incentives to develop and protect the environment.

III. HRA RECOMMENDS THAT THE CSW:

A. Support the Sub-commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights working group's Draft Universal Human Rights Guidelines for Companies,[25] and suggest that they be made mandatory.

B. Suggest to ECOSOC that it request that UN bodies affecting trade and development consider the specific impact of the environment on human rights as they affect women and girls. With the following examples as possible methods to prevent creating or worsening natural disasters:

1. Water

a) Growing needs and a dwindling resource base will require many countries to reassess their water management policies. The international community can support and encourage these efforts and work to make water affordable to the poor and lessen the threats of flooding in carrying disease and taking homes.

2. Deforestation

a) Suggest that deforestations affect on human rights be taken into account and specifically encourage good management of forests so that the rights of women are not harmed.

b) The Commission could recognize and/or support efforts to have products labeled as coming from a well managed forest.[26]

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[25] E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/33, draft guidelines E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/WG.2/WP.1/Add.1.
[26] http://www.fscoax.org/principal.htm.